

Government Organization

example of window dressing. We trust the functions which the minister has taken over from other departments will put teeth into the minister's efforts to protect the consumers of Canada. Finally, I again express the hope that the minister's functions will be more clearly defined so as to avoid the likelihood of a conflict of jurisdictions.

Mrs. MacInnis: Mr. Chairman, we can have little quarrel with the amendments proposed in this bill. They relate to the transfer of functions from the standards branch and from the Food and Drug Directorate to the department, and to the provision of inspection services. We favour these changes. We also welcome the minister's announcement that he intends to open regional offices. This would be a move toward decentralizing the administration. Nevertheless, it seems to me the minister has not made much of an attempt to outline the functions of his department in general.

I am not entirely satisfied that there was a thorough examination of this subject in committee. There were aspects of the subject that we had no chance to question at the time. Thus, while we are discussing the reorganization of government departments, I think we should take advantage of the opportunity to say some of the things which are on our minds. I want to talk for a while about the purpose of this department. As now constituted, the department has three branches—one might call them the three faces of Eve: consumer affairs, corporate affairs and combines investigation. Corporate affairs, the swinging, capitalist personality, is responsible for all matters involving corporations and corporate securities including such matters as bankruptcy, patents, copy rights and trademarks. In general, to use the words of the minister, this part of the department is concerned with administering many of the federal laws which regulate the businesses which supply goods and services. In this connection, the minister sees the role of the department as "increasing investor and shareholder confidence and enhancing the opportunities for raising capital." In addition he sees the department as an instrument for "ensuring probity in the marketplace." I prefer to take the minister's words rather than those of anybody else when they are available.

The combines investigation branch seems to me a most insecure and secretive personality. It is supposed to ensure a vigorous economy through a sound competition policy basic to a

prosperous and vigorous economy. Again, I use the minister's words.

Finally, the consumer affairs branch is supposed to protect consumers from the abuses inherent in this same vigorous, competitive economy. I emphasize the word "inherent". It is supposed to protect them against fraud and deception by manufacturers through sub-standard packaging, inadequate labelling, misleading advertizing, games, gimmicks and questionable credit practices.

In addition to concern about the safety and quality of products, the department is also supposed to be concerned with their price. After all, the department was set up after an investigation into the prices of consumer goods with particular reference to the price of food and the price of housing. I do not think we should lose sight of these circumstances. At the time, a great deal of credit was given to the boycotts by women consumers around this country as being instrumental in bringing that investigation about and giving final weight to the request for a department of consumer affairs.

The department was supposed to operate not only in terms of obscure and personal price indexes and figures relating to the performance of the economy but also in connection with the specific problems of people, including people living on low incomes, people living on fixed incomes and people without enough information to be "rational" consumers—people without proper protection.

The minister referred to the first aspect of these functions when he spoke during the budget debate on November 8, 1968. He said:

I rise to speak today because of my particular interest in the performance of the Canadian economy from the point of view of the consumer whom it is my statutory obligation to represent.

Despite these fine sentiments and some real effort on the part of the minister, the department has failed to deal with the most urgent problems faced by people. I think it is doomed to continue this failure unless at least two important changes are made. First, the department has to overcome its schizophrenic personality. Second it must relate directly to people, and learn to work with them directly.

As far as the schizophrenic personality of the department is concerned, the minister says it is his statutory obligation to represent the consumer. But because of the way in which the department is now constituted it is also his statutory obligation to represent